

Rediscovering Bethune

Proposal for a one-hour documentary

by Martin Duckworth

Ask any teenager on a street in a Canadian City who Norman Bethune might be, and you will **probably** get a blank stare. Celebrated in Canada for his crucial contribution to tuberculosis treatment, recognized internationally as the first doctor to bring blood transfusions to the front lines during the Spanish Civil War, and for bringing medical clinics to the front line during the Long March of Mao Tse-Chung in China, ~~his~~ ^{Bethune's} accomplishments are often lost on the youth of today.

November 12 of this year will be the 70th anniversary of Bethune's death, in ~~China~~. This is causing a flurry of publications, exhibitions and celebrations of his legacy (new books by Adrienne Clarkson, Rod Stewart and Larry Hennant; opening of an enlarged Bethune Square at the corner of Guy and Maisonneuve; exhibitions at McCord Museum and le Centre Historique de Montréal). One educator in Montreal is making sure his students take notice.

→ Pierre Carle became fascinated with Bethune when he took his ^{Master's} Maitrise in History at UQAM, where he studied with Bethune's friend Stanley Ryerson.
→ ^{Presently, had} He ~~has~~ just completed his first year as Director of College Regina Assumpta, a multi-ethnic co-ed classical college in Ahuntsic, north Montreal. He
→ ~~ensured that Bethune was treated as a subject~~ ^I in the College's new course in Mandarin, ^{Pierre Carle Bethune's history was part of the curriculum.}

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WRITING CALENDAR

24 June - 8 July, 2009: Participate in the lives of our three Canadian characters as they greet and host their Chinese exchange partners for a two week stay in Montreal

7 – 14 September, 2009: Prepare research and plans for trip to Shanghai, appointments with Chinese students, teachers and possible co-producer in China.

18 – end of September, 2009: One week during this period will be a trip to Shanghai to visit characters there – Students, Dr. Couture, teachers, and possibly Dashan.

October, 2009: Two weeks of script writing for final film treatment.

Note: While this is just the writing/development phase of Rediscovering Bethune, I will need the assistance of someone experienced in both development and in producing an international co-production. Janet Torge has considerable experience in both these domains. Even more relevant to this project, she has worked on two productions which had considerable shooting in China and is in touch with a producer there who can broker a co-production with a Chinese broadcaster. Although this phase is primarily focused on content research and writing, meeting with this Chinese producer which I am working in Shanghai would be an opportunity not to be missed.

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WRITER'S VISION

This is the kind of film I do the best—operating a hand-held camera while capturing experiences of people going through periods in their lives that are critical, not only to themselves but to the world around them.

Research for this film will concentrate on finding complementary Chinese characters whose interactions with the Canadian characters illustrate how young people bond across both cultural and language divides.

In June, when the Chinese students arrive, I will be able to spend time with our characters and their Chinese partners. My experiences with them will help determine the style and filmatic approach of the documentary. My goal will be to answer questions such as: Is a narrator necessary to follow the story? Will the young people be able to articulate their feelings? If not, how can these feelings be captured on film? Are the three primary characters the best choices for the film? Are their respective Chinese counterparts the best choices? Can other students be included and if so, on what level?

Although it has been possible through an initial research phase to see the Canadian students in their home and school life, I have planned a trip to Shanghai this summer, to get to know better the Chinese students in the exchange programme. I will be able to meet with teachers and students in the school, see where our Chinese characters live and speak to them about their experiences in Canada, after they have had a chance to digest the

experience. All of this information will be crucial in creating a structure and writing the treatment for the film.

During this phase, I will also tackle the challenge of how to include the story of Bethune. In his own way, he will be a key character, presented as a legend who binds the two countries of Canada and China together. He is definitely part of the imagination of the students in the exchange programme and a driving force behind the Director's mandarin course here in Montreal. But how much history and archives can be included and still keep the main focus of the story on the students?

What is most exciting for me is writing a script that will reflect the various discoveries our characters will undertake throughout the film. Teenagers are complicated humans, and so I don't expect this element of their experience to be straightforward. But there is a child-like excitement still present in adolescents when they find out something new about the world and that must be captured on screen.

The treatment must also include the exchanges among the students on various levels: their cultures, pastimes, views about authority, dreams for the future, what they think about school, how they deal with their parents and siblings, etc. All of these issues will form the content of the relationships among the Chinese and Canadian students. In that sense, the film will be a fresh perspective for anyone interested in school exchange programmes –the perspective of the youth involved.

There is much to challenge a writer in forming the spine of this film but the characters and content are rich and full of promise.